

RE- IMAGINING ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS IN AMITAV GHOSH

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Abstract:

Literature has become the voice of the Green Earth and as a result several genres have developed in the course of time. Environmentalism, Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, Deep Green Resistance etc. has offered solutions to the concerns relating to environment. Amitav Ghosh is a writer who has taken up environment related themes to frame his works. "The Town by the Sea" is one of his works which could be read in the light of environmental literature. By explaining the civilization which was the cause of environmental problems according to the theories of Deep Green Resistance, the notable work of Amitav Ghosh could be analyzed and possible solutions could be offered.

Keywords: *Environmentalism, Deep Green Resistance, Deep Ecology, Civilization.*

Literature from time immemorial has been connected to nature and as a result, various genres sprung up through centuries. As climatic crises affected earth, literature was successful in depicting the changing realities of nature as well as offering solutions to the environmental challenges which resulted in the emergence of climate literature. Thus along with the scientists who provided data on environment, writers offered an imaginative frame to environment through their pioneering works. When humanity is gobbling up a large part of the living world, literature is capable of projecting the environmental abnormality.

It has become inevitable for human beings to proceed along the new trajectory and as a result the problems are formidable to require a redirection. Literature hopes to manage the crises in civilization and that feat might be accomplished by generation in future through emerging trends in literature. A radical environment movement which seeks to find political and sociological solutions to environmental concerns, Deep Green Resistance is linked to Deep Ecology. Arne Næss, in his 1972 paper that laid the foundations of the movement describes Deep ecology as both science and philosophy in equal parts. According to him, the spiritual element is necessitated by the fact that biology alone can neither foster the understanding, nor muster the emotional response required for the conservation of nature for its own sake. Thus, he traces the origin of the movement to scientist-philosophers who were out in the field studying the biodiversity and wild ecosystems throughout the globe. He also suggests Rachel Carson's publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962 to be the central event that culminated in the theory taking shape as a worldview.

Deep ecology is an environmental movement and philosophy which regards human life as just one of many equal components of a global ecosystem. It is aimed at promoting the inherent worth of living beings as opposed to their instrumental utility to human needs, which in turn would necessitate a restructuring of modern human societies in more eco-friendly terms. Deep ecology argues that the natural world is a subtle balance of complex inter-relationships in which the existence of organisms is dependent on the existence of other communities of life-forms within ecosystems.

Human interference with or destruction of the natural world therefore poses a threat not only to humans, but to all organisms constituting the natural order. Hence, deep ecology works on the belief that the living environment as a whole should be respected and regarded as having certain inalienable legal rights to live and flourish, not based on its instrumental benefits for human use. Because of this holistic

approach, the theory is often described in terms of the idea of a much broader sociality; it recognizes diverse communities of life on Earth that are composed not only of biotic factors but also, where applicable, through ethical relations, that is, the valuing of other beings as more than just resources. It describes itself as "deep" because it regards itself as looking more deeply into the actual reality of humanity's relationship with the natural world arriving at philosophically more profound conclusions than that of the prevailing view of ecology as a branch of biology. (Sessions 72)

The term created for a conference entitled "Deep Green Resistance: Confronting Industrial Culture" in 2007 by Lierre Keith, it draws on elements of anthropology, deep ecology and ecofeminism. Derrick Jensen, in the Preface to *Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet* foregrounds the idea of fighting back against "the dominant culture- civilization that is killing the planet." (Mcbay. et.,al Preface)

Derrick Jensen goes on say on the need to think and feel for ourselves. He says:

The strategy of Deep Green Resistance (DGR) starts by acknowledging the dire circumstances that industrial civilization has created for life on this planet. The goal of DGR is to deprive the rich of their ability to steal from the poor and the powerful of their ability to destroy the planet. It also means defending and rebuilding just and sustainable human communities nestled inside repaired and restored land bases (Jensen Preface)

Again, "an essential dynamic of civilization is the centralization of power and the externalization of consequences."

"The Town by the Sea," included in the anthology *Incendiary Circumstances: A Chronicle of the Turmoil of Our Times* by Amitav Ghosh, the prominent Indian writer written about the Tsunami of 26 December 2004, could be deconstructed from the light of Deep Green Resistance. The loss and trauma of Tsunami is very well pictured through the environmental devastation and massive destruction which the Director, the central character of a Malaria Research Centre has to endure. Aric Mcbay, Lierre Keith and Derrick Jensen in their book, *Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet,* foreground the crises of civilization and point out certain characteristics that the most "worrisome hazards" share. They share the idea that the problems are quick and definite, that means progressive, rather than the possibility of getting affected. The probability of getting affected is neglected by the human race.

The Director doesn't understand the grossness even when he hears that Tsunami had hit the town. He is presented as never expecting anything negative which is evident when he cuts off the call of his wife from Malacca while running outside. He was firm in his belief that he would phone back later when the tremors stopped. Unaware of the progressive aspect of the hazards, he thinks about the probability. He is not realizing the fact that such environmental problems are swift and definite.

Secondly the problem may seem to be less severe than it actually is. However human beings fail to notice the impending danger. The hazard appeared to be less severe for the Director to understand the seriousness of the issue only later. The Director failed to understand that it had long lead. On the morning of the 26th he was woken up by the shaking of the bed. Even when he stepped off to find the floor heaving and realized the earthquake had hit the town, he never expected that a Tsunami would strike or he would lose his family. The narrator says,

But he had little time to think about the matter because a strange phenomenon had suddenly begun to manifest itself before him: the water in the harbor had begun to rise, very rapidly, and the anchored ships seemed to be swirling about in the grip of an unseen hand. (15)

Similarly when the Director goes back to place where his house stood, the narrator describes how fire caused disasters apart from water. He says:

At the far end of the maidan, a fire was blazing among the coconut palms. The warehouse that supplied the island with cooking gas had stood at that spot. The Tsunami had swept the warehouse away, leaving the canisters exposed to the sun, and a fire had ensued. Every few

minutes the ground shook with the blast of exploding canisters. (19)

The crises grow beforehand before it becomes visible in nature. Aric Mcbay says that the hazards have deeply rooted momentum. The problems are inherent in the civilization preventing necessary changes.

Contemporary political societies are increasingly faced with a wide variety of ecological crises, including climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, deforestation, and pollution. For instance, Amitav Ghosh made it clear, thus "the road wound through a dense tropical jungle; it was clear that the island's interior was sparsely inhabited, with the population being concentrated along the seafront." (17) Here, it is evident that a road wound through the dense tropical jungle obviously pointing to the fact that even the dense jungle was exploited for their cause.

According to Aric Mcbay, mostly the hazards are industrially driven and with the ecocidal practices the nature gets affected adversely through exploitations such as resource extraction. The vast population growth and the overuse of land forced people to focus even to the seafronts. They rarely inhabit the interior of the islands as it leaves less scope for advancements and developments; as well as easy access to the materialistic world. As the theory of Deep Green Resistance puts forth, crises provide benefits to the powerful and costs to the powerless. The damage and danger affect the powerless the most. They facilitate temporary victories and permanent losses which turn out to be a trauma to the humanity.

I saw to my surprise that many thick stands of coconut palms were still standing, even on the edge of the water. As for the forest, the canopy seemed almost undisturbed. All traces of habitation on the other hand, had been obliterated: the foundations of many buildings could be clearly seen, on the ground. But of the structures they had once supported, nothing remained. It is evident that the tsunami had been peculiarly selective in the manner of its destruction, The villages along the shores were not merely damaged; they were erased, It was as if the island had been hit by a weapon devised to cause the maximum possible damage to life and property, while leaving nature largely unharmed. We came to the District Library. Like the surrounding offices, it was unharmed, but a medical camp, manned by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, had sprung up on its grounds. (18)

While narrating the pity and horror of Tsunami, Amitav Ghosh indirectly projects how the Director had built his house. He points out that only the foundation was concrete and the rest was wood. This is an indication to how human beings exploit environment to satisfy their needs. The happiness and contentment which human beings yearn for turn out to be a loss for them in future. The realization which comes late fails to pacify the traumatic experiences. In the extremity of that moment, human beings impersonalize themselves in utter desolation.

When the narrator reached out his arm to comfort the Director, he shook his hand briskly away. Probably because of the civilized culture, narrator thinks that he was accustomed to adversity and had invented many rules for dealing with it. The drive to environmental conquest and self propagation has made man self-centered that they place themselves first. The physical environment in which man lives thereby becomes destabilized through their careless activity for immediate pleasures. The reconsideration of self image as a species has become imminent.

As suggested by Aric Mcbay, Lierre Keith and Derrick Jensen, the solutions to the hazards caused could be reprioritized as it requires considerable time. They turn out to be ineffective with its reliance on political and powerful elites. Rather than focusing merely on the singular issues, the distant future with changing lifestyle must be prioritized for effective action. Even when the Director loses his daughter and wife, he tends to impersonalize himself from the trauma of Tsunami. He seems to be caught up in a challenging civilized culture without feeling any concern towards his fellow beings. When human beings have been chipping away its diversity, they might have lost their sensitivity towards the infinite nature of creation. It was in fact misfortunate on the part of man to be so insensitive increasingly that they lost a sense

of global responsibility. However oddly, people tend to underestimate the likelihood and impact of such encroachment into natural world and exploitation of the resources of earth. The academics have taken up the issue to avoid all environmental catastrophes of civilization.

Studies on environment could never be conclusive as new environmental realities keep emerging. Since interpretation of literature affords opportunity for free play of meaning which is moving through a chain of signification, reading works of literature from already existing genres for the theme of climate change becomes a profitable exercise in that it helps to determine the impact of the environmental discourse on both the authors and their readership. Thus climate change literature continues to redefine itself, opening new possibilities, conquering with its roots new surfaces like the greenness it represents as it expands, effectively rediscovering life and growth through the liberal humanities and literature to challenge the decertifying tendencies of a capitalistic system drunk on anthropocentrism and economic monopoly.

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